



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
Center for Mental Health Services
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MODULE IV

**Strategies To Promote a
Positive Classroom Climate**

IV

MODULE IV: OVERVIEW FOR TRAINERS

This module addresses ways to help create a classroom climate that promotes learning and mental health for all students. It begins with a general discussion of classroom climate, which leads into two case studies, one on stigma (Mrs. Rogers and a Lesson on Stigma) and one on bullying (Brett's Story). Most of the rest of the module is devoted to strategies that take advantage of adolescent development to improve classroom climate. After walking through a case study with the trainer, participants will break into small groups to brainstorm about effective ways to cope with specific behaviors, using their knowledge of teen social and emotional development. In the final section, participants discuss how specific strategies, already part of the teaching tools they know and use, can benefit students with mental health needs.

MODULE IV: STRATEGIES TO PROMOTE A POSITIVE CLASSROOM CLIMATE

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MODULE IV: GOAL

The goal of Module IV is to help increase awareness of strategies to create an accepting classroom climate that promotes learning for all students, including those with mental health needs.

MODULE IV: OBJECTIVES

At the end of this module, participants will be able to:

- Discuss the relationship among classroom climate, learning, and mental health;
- Give examples of strategies that promote a positive classroom climate by taking advantage of adolescent social-emotional development;
- Describe strategies for maintaining an accepting, stigma-free classroom climate; and
- Describe instructional strategies that promote a positive classroom climate and mental health.

MODULE IV: TRAINER'S OUTLINE

IV-1 Introduction

- A. Remind participants that the overall purpose of the training is to help eliminate barriers to learning by understanding and addressing mental health issues in the school environment.
- B. Show Slides IV-A (Goal) and IV-B (Objectives).
- C. Give overview of the module (*Trainer Note IV-1*).
- D. Make the point: This module does not teach new skills; participants already have the skills that they need. The next hour they will explore ways to use those skills to create a classroom climate that promotes mental health.

SLIDE IV-A
SLIDE IV-B

IV-2 Classroom Climate, Learning, and Mental Health

- A. Show Slide IV-C (The Context of Learning).
- B. Point out the many different elements that make up the context of learning, including classroom climate.
- C. Show Slide IV-D (Positive Classroom Climate). Make the following points (*Trainer Note IV-2*):
 - Classroom climate refers to students' perceptions about the overall setting where instruction and learning take place.
 - The primary goal of establishing a positive classroom climate is to be able to instruct to a range of individual learning styles—including those of students who have or may be at risk for mental health and emotional problems—while sustaining a caring atmosphere.

SLIDE IV-C

SLIDE IV-D

MODULE IV: TRAINER'S OUTLINE (CONTINUED)

- Positive classroom climate helps provide the protective factors of supportive relationships, consistent expectations, opportunities to contribute, and recognition for accomplishments that promote youth resilience.
- D. Make participants aware of the concept of cultural competence and its importance to classroom climate (*Trainer Note IV-2*).
Cultural competence involves:
 - Being aware and respectful of the values, beliefs, traditions, and customs of students and their families
 - Recognizing the impact of one's own culture on the teacher/student relationship
 - Taking these factors into account when planning and implementing classroom policies and activities
- E. Refer to Module I. Remind participants that students who have difficulty adjusting to social-emotional development may be at risk for mental health and emotional problems. Make the following point:
 - By encouraging adjustment through classroom practices, the teacher is *promoting mental health*.

IV-3 Assess Classroom Environment for Barriers to Learning

- A. Show Slide IV-E (Apply S.U.C.C.E.S.S.) and refer to Handout IV-A (S.U.C.C.E.S.S.).
- B. Discuss each area and ask for suggestions (*Trainer Note IV-3*).

SLIDE IV-E
HANDOUT IV-A

MODULE IV: TRAINER'S OUTLINE (CONTINUED)

IV-4 Promote Mental Health by Maintaining a Stigma-Free Climate

- A. Refer to Handout IV-B (Mrs. Rogers and a Lesson on Stigma). Ask participants to read only the first paragraph.
- B. Ask for ideas on how to handle this situation, and write them on a flipchart or chalkboard.
- C. Have participants read the rest of the handout. Discuss the pros and cons of Mrs. Rogers' approach versus those suggested by the group.
- D. Make the following suggestions:
- Use opportunities within the curriculum, school events, and student-shared experiences to talk candidly about "in groups" and "out groups" and the importance of acceptance of individual differences (*Trainer Note IV-4*).
 - Observe whether stigmatization of students with social-emotional difficulties occurs through language, social behavior, and/or other exchanges between students, and intervene.
 - Model respectful communication.
 - Allow participants to share observations and discuss how beliefs are formed.

HANDOUT IV-B

IV-5 Bullying

- A. Refer to Handout IV-C (Brett's Story). Ask participants:
- What clues can you gather from Brett's story?
 - Which, if any, of those behaviors can be called bullying?
 - What was the impact on Brett?
 - Who, if anyone, do you think was aware of Brett's problem?

HANDOUT IV-C



MODULE IV: TRAINER'S OUTLINE (CONTINUED)

- Do you know anyone in your class or school that may have this problem?
- What would you do to help Brett? In the classroom? In the school environment?
- B. Make the following points (*Trainer Note IV-5*):
 - Bullying occurs in the absence of intervention.
 - Bullying is a form of violence that affects the social and learning climate.
- C. Ask participants: What steps would you take in this and similar situations? Make the following points or suggestions:
 - Send a clear message about intolerance for this type of violence.
 - Determine the nature and extent of the school's bullying problem by speaking with students, staff, school bus drivers, and other personnel who observe students routinely.
 - Set the objective to reduce and eliminate existing bullying problems among students.
 - Voice clear expectations to students, such as "No students will bully or victimize other students." Define bully and victimization for the students. Discuss the topic and allow students to speak about how bullying has impacted them (e.g., not sure what to do; tried to stop it but got hurt, etc.).
 - Voice expectations for help-seeking and assistance, such as "Students will help other students who are victimized and put an end to bullying by telling adults about the problem."
 - Work as a team member with other school staff to develop schoolwide strategies to reduce bullying.

MODULE IV: TRAINER'S OUTLINE (CONTINUED)

IV-6 Take Advantage of Adolescent Development To Improve Classroom Climate

- A. Refer to Handout IV-D (Adolescent Development and Classroom Climate).
- B. Make the following points:
- Despite outward appearances, high school students continue to rely upon others to help them interpret themselves, social events, and the world around them.
 - Teachers can take advantage of these factors to develop a stronger community of learners within the classroom.
- C. Ask participants to read Handout IV-E (Mr. Fox and Tardiness). Show how the behaviors relate to teen development and how Mr. Fox took advantage of one aspect of teen development to address tardiness (*Trainer Note IV-6*).
- D. Divide participants into small groups. Write the following behaviors and related aspects of development on the easel or chalkboard.
- Behavior: Headphones on during lecture.
Aspect of Development: Youth endeavor to define themselves.
 - Behavior: Students seem to be seated by cliques and several students are openly excluded.
Aspect of Development: Youth compare themselves to peers.
 - Behavior: One student insults another.
Aspect of Development: Youth learn from social interactions.

HANDOUT IV-D

HANDOUT IV-E

MODULE IV: TRAINER'S OUTLINE (CONTINUED)

Assign one of these behaviors to each group and let them brainstorm specific strategies, referring to the general strategies suggested on Handout IV-D (Adolescent Development and Classroom Climate).

HANDOUT IV-D

- E. Reconvene the whole group and ask each group to report on their efforts. For further discussion, you may ask:
- Are these common situations in your school?
 - What resources in your school could you call on for help with these situations/strategies?

IV-7 Promote a Positive Climate Through Instructional Strategies

- A. First, make the point: **Participants don't need to learn new strategies; they already know them.**
- B. Briefly review strategies suggested by the UCLA Resource Center for Mental Health in Schools, using Slides IV-E and IV-F (Classroom-Focused Enabling: Instructional Strategies) (*Trainer Note IV-7*).
- C. Discuss how one or more of these strategies could be useful in teaching students with mental health needs. For example:
- Depressive disorders can make students highly sensitive to negative feedback and lead them to expect to fail. What strategies might be helpful for such students?
 - A student with an anxiety disorder may have trouble concentrating. Which of these strategies might be helpful?

SLIDE IV-E
SLIDE IV-F

MODULE IV: TRAINER'S OUTLINE (CONTINUED)

- Problems with attention are the hallmark of ADHD. Could any of these strategies be particularly useful with a student with ADHD?
- Ask participants to share their own experiences with these or related strategies in their own classrooms.

IV-8 Closing

- A. Summarize major points of the module, referring to objectives.
- B. Ask for comments and questions.
- C. Ask participants to complete evaluation form.

MODULE IV: TRAINER PREPARATION NOTES

IV-1 Introduction

Overview. This module does not teach new strategies or skills. Instead, participants will focus on the teaching skills and strategies they already use, exploring ways that they influence the climate of their classrooms and schools, support a safe and orderly environment, and promote mental health. These skills are specially important when teaching teens with mental health needs.

Note on presentation. It is highly recommended that this module be presented in partnership with a teacher, especially one who has experience with or an interest in mental health issues.

IV-2 Classroom Climate, Learning, and Mental Health

Further notes on classroom climate. The following is provided for the trainer's background information. Participants already may be familiar with these concepts. As a trainer, you can shorten or lengthen this section, as appropriate.

Positive educational climates:

- Maximize instruction time and individual learning;
- Emphasize proactive strategies to prevent academic failure;
- Stress prevention of behavioral problems to uphold student behavioral competency;
- Encourage a developmental perspective;
- Increase opportunities for student involvement and success; and
- Deploy systematic procedures to address the learning and behavioral needs of students.

This is accomplished through coordination of efforts at the building and classroom levels.

Developing a positive classroom climate requires efforts beyond behavior management. (Behavior management refers to a set of techniques applied to observable behavior in order to achieve a desired outcome.) Classroom climate is, in essence, the perceptions about the overall setting where instruction and learning take place. The primary goal of establishing a positive classroom climate is to be able to instruct to a range of individual differences while sustaining a caring and accepting atmosphere.

Refer to Module II's discussion of risk and protective factors and youth resilience. Note the protective factors that also are included in the discussion of positive classroom climate. As you progress through this

MODULE IV: TRAINER PREPARATION NOTES

module, continue to address how each aspect of positive classroom climate promotes youth resilience and thus mental health.

About cultural competence. Individual differences can stem from cultural differences, which is why cultural competence is an essential part of positive classroom climate. Cultural competence differs from cultural awareness or sensitivity in that it entails not just being aware of and accepting cultural differences, but implementing policies and attitudes that work in cross-cultural situations. More information on cultural competence is available at www.air.org/cecp/cultural/default.htm.

IV-3 Assess Classroom Environment for Barriers to Learning

Background. The S.U.C.C.E.S.S. handout suggests various ways of assessing classroom environment for barriers to learning. The components of the S.U.C.C.E.S.S. strategy, which was designed specifically for this training, are based on the work of Sprick, R.S., Borgmeier, C., & Nolet, V. (2002). *Prevention and Management of Behavior Problems in Secondary Schools*.¹

IV-4 Promote Mental Health by Maintaining a Stigma-Free Climate

Background. Stigma refers to how individuals or groups of people can be discounted, shamed, or otherwise “marked” because of their social status. At the core level, it entails an “in group” and an “out group.” Stigma comes about from false ideas, myths, or inadequate information. To maintain a stigma-free learning environment means replacing misconceptions with knowledge and providing alternative perspectives.

IV-5 Bullying

Background. Bullying is a form of harassment and abuse that takes place both in and out of school. Bullying creates a climate of fear that affects the social and learning environment. It can contribute to long-term negative outcomes, behavioral and emotional difficulties, and violence. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration provides information about bullying, as well as prevention and intervention resources, at www.mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/15plus/aboutbullying.asp.

¹ Sprick, R.S., Borgmeier, C., and Nolet, V. (2002). *Prevention and Management of Behavior Problems in Secondary Schools*. In Shinn, M., Walker H. M., and Stoner, G. (eds.). *Interventions for Academic and Behavioral Problems II*. Bethesda, MD: National Association of School Psychologists.

MODULE IV: TRAINER PREPARATION NOTES

IV-6 Take Advantage of Adolescent Development To Improve Classroom Climate

Background. Students at the secondary school level are experimenting with independence and coming to an understanding of where they fit in the world. Communication provides feedback to youth regarding their physical, intellectual, and social-emotional competencies. Despite outward appearances, high school students continue to rely upon others to help them interpret themselves, social events, and the world around them. Teachers can take advantage of these inclinations to develop a stronger community of learners within the classroom.

Activity IV-6. This activity uses the example of student tardiness to illustrate one of the strategies in the handout regarding adolescent development. The behavior, tardiness, is related to the first aspect of development listed: “Youth strive for independence.” Mr. Fox’s response shows him taking advantage of this need for independence through the strategies shown on the handout, i.e., supporting autonomy and innovation; stressing order through consistency, fairness, and respect; and promoting involvement in classroom governance.

Divide participants into small groups to work on developing strategies to respond to other behaviors and to take advantage of teen development.

- Behavior: Headphones on during lecture.
Aspect of Development: Youth endeavor to define themselves.
- Behavior: Students seem to be seated by cliques and several students are openly excluded.
Aspect of Development: Youth compare themselves to peers.
- Behavior: One student insults another.
Aspect of Development: Youth learn from social interactions.

Encourage participants in the groups to discuss a response to the behavior indicated that capitalizes on the aspect of teen development and promotes a positive classroom climate. The purpose of this activity is for participants to think creatively, to share how they have responded historically to certain behaviors, and to hear about other ways to respond. They may wish to “check” their responses against the classroom strategy column on Handout IV-D to see how well responses match elements of a positive classroom climate. They can reconvene to discuss their responses,

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and the ease or difficulty with which they were able to formulate positive responses to undesired behaviors.

IV-7 Promote a Positive Climate Through Instructional Strategies

Facilitating brainstorming activity. Emphasize that the strategies reviewed in this section are already known to teachers; in this activity, participants will discuss these strategies with specific reference to teens with mental health needs.

The activity starts with a review of Classroom-Focused Enabling (Slides IV-F and IV-G), which comes from the UCLA Resource Center for Mental Health in Schools. This is one of several national resources on mental health and learning (see Resources at the end of this trainer's manual). Participants then brainstorm about ways to use these strategies or others to help students with specific mental health needs. To help them get started, use the questions in the Trainer's Outline. (Note: These questions use information on how specific disorders affect learning and behavior, which is found in Module II, Handouts II-F, II-H, and II-I.)